
STRAWBERRY HILL

NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY



Glacken Field Tot Lot

A JOINT REPORT OF THE

STRAWBERRY HILL NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY COMMITTEE AND

THE CAMBRIDGE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

STRAWBERRY HILL

NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY

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The Strawberry Hill Neighborhood Study Committee and the Community Development Department would like to thank all the Strawberry Hill residents who participated in the public forums held on May 21, 1997 and February 25, 1998.

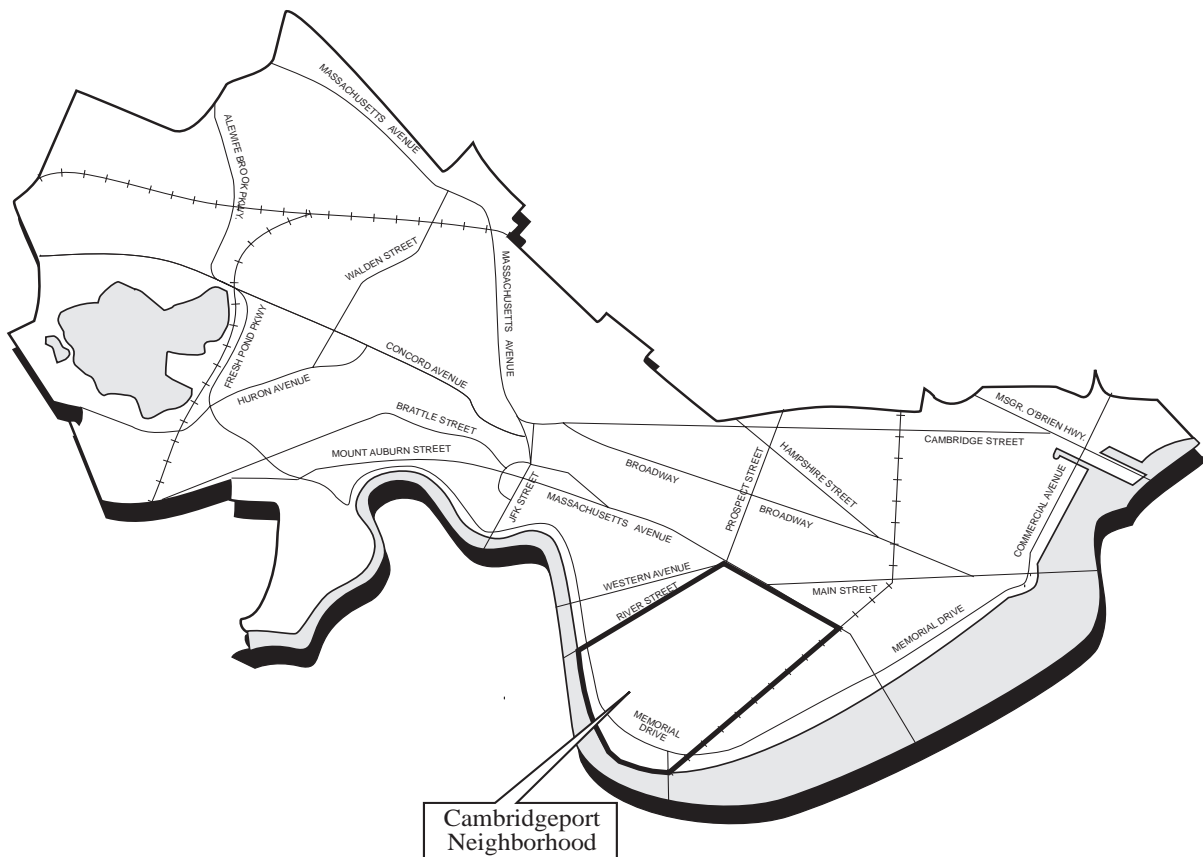
Also, thanks to the Cambridge School Department for allowing us to hold our meetings at the Haggerty School and to Kathy Kelsey of the Haggerty Community School for her assistance and participation.

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

City of Cambridge
Strawberry Hill Neighborhood Location



Introduction

THE NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY PROCESS

The neighborhood study process was established in the 1980's to address quality of life issues which concerned Cambridge residents during that time. A wave of commercial growth and economic development in the City and metropolitan region brought an increasing awareness of issues such as congestion and parking problems, the rising cost of housing, and inadequate open space. A downturn in the national and regional economy in the early 1990's has given way to an increase in commercial growth in the City of Cambridge prompting residents concerns about quality of life issues which include density, land use, and traffic.

The Community Development Department's (CDD) neighborhood planning program published the first neighborhood study in 1988 and has completed a comprehensive study in nine of the City's thirteen neighborhoods. The object of the neighborhood studies is to identify major planning problems and concerns in all the City's neighborhoods through a joint CDD and community committee and formulate recommendations for their solutions. The studies address issues such as traffic and transportation, open space, housing affordability and home ownership, neighborhood commercial areas and employment, park maintenance and rezoning of areas now inappropriately zoned. As part of each neighborhood study, CDD collects data on demographic changes since 1980, as well as changes in housing markets, land use, and development potential in each neighborhood.

For each study, the City Manager appoints a committee of neighborhood residents and civic leaders, along with staff from the CDD, to review the data, identify what problems exist in the neighborhood, and make recommendations as to how to resolve these problems. The recommendations are presented to the City Council and, where appropriate, are incorporated into the work programs of City departments for implementation over the next several years.

THE STRAWBERRY HILL NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY

In 1997, the CDD staff placed advertisements in the local media seeking Strawberry Hill residents to join the upcoming Committee. In 1997, City Manager Robert Healy named 13 of the applicants to the Committee. The newly named members came from different parts of the neighborhood with the aim of representing the demographic diversity of the neighborhood. Some of the members were lifelong residents, while others had lived there less than five years.

The Strawberry Hill Neighborhood Committee met twice a month for fourteen months from February, 1997 until April, 1998. The Committee reviewed, discussed, and debated issues of housing, open space, economic development, land use, zoning and urban design. They listened to a range of speakers from representatives of non-profit agencies working in Strawberry Hill to City staff and toured the neighborhood. Through the discussions, the Committee identified problems around the neighborhood and worked together to

come up with recommendations for each topic. The Committee made presentations during two public forums on each topic they discussed which allowed the forum participants an opportunity to comment on recommendations.

At the end of the process, the Committee produced four pages of recommendations ranging from managing backyard development, establishing an alternative use of the railroad corridor behind Huron Avenue and Mt. Auburn Street, to creation of an independent neighborhood association. The Committee offers this study and its recommendations to the Strawberry Hill community as a means to create a long-term planning guide for the neighborhood and to secure its well-being in the years to come.

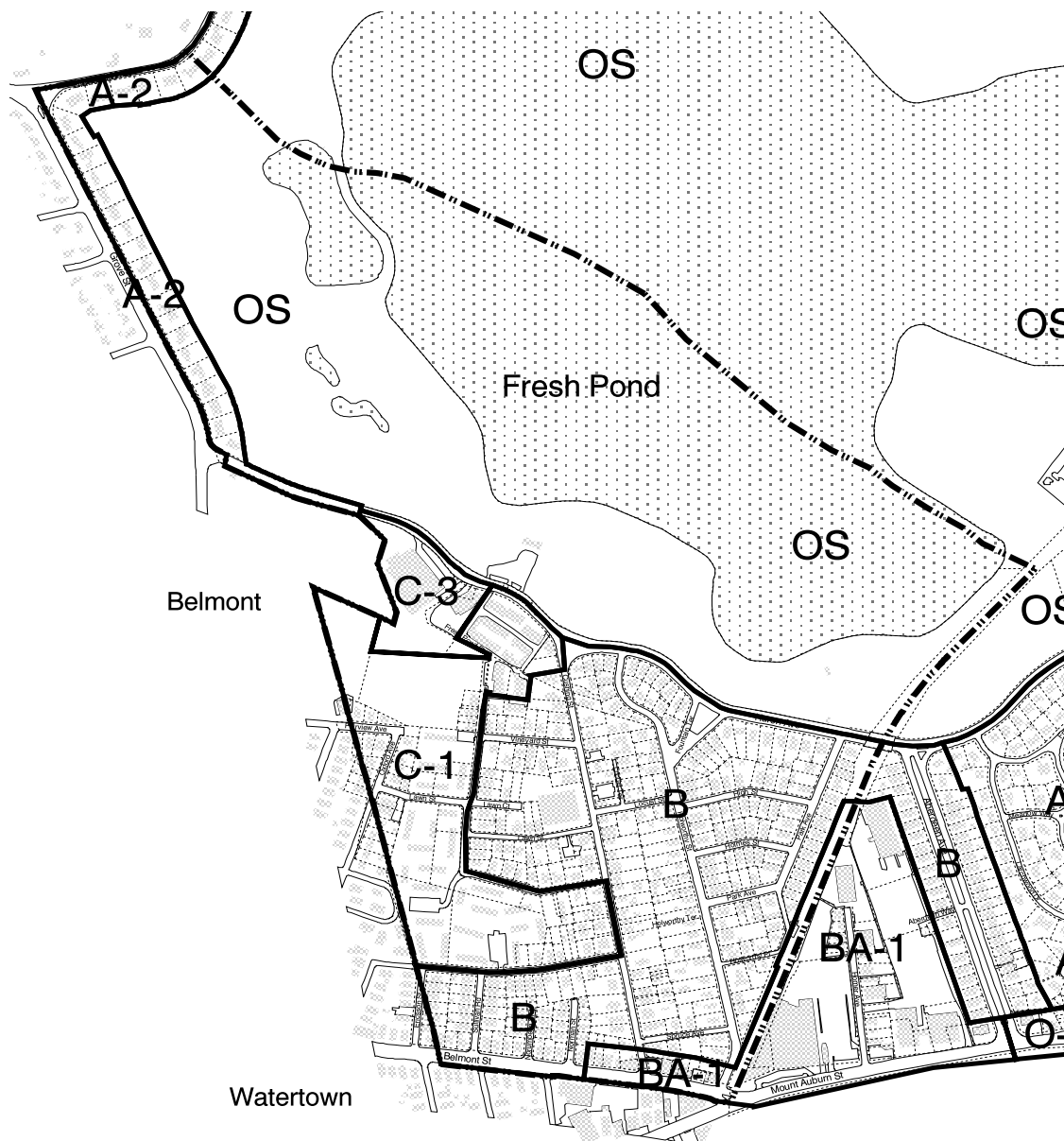
THE CITY OF CAMBRIDGE GROWTH POLICY

The Neighborhood Study process is seen as an extension of the City's Growth Policy. The Growth Policy document, "Towards a Sustainable Future," is endorsed by the City Council and outlines the City's planning assumptions and

policies in the areas of land use, housing, transportation, economic development, open space and urban design. The document was drafted by CDD staff in 1992-1993 after a series of workshops with citizen, business and institutional representatives. It recognizes that the City's diversity of land uses, densities and population groups should be retained and strengthened. The document also calls for careful development of the City's evolving industrial districts, such as Alewife and lower Cambridgeport.

While the growth policy document is comprehensive, it does not prescribe land uses or designs for specific sites. Each of the City's 13 neighborhoods has distinct needs and resources which can be identified and addressed through neighborhood studies and the City's planning policies. The Growth Policy and neighborhood studies complement each other by informing the Cambridge community of important issues, recommending a plan of action to address the concerns, and utilizing current policies to implement change.

Strawberry Hill Neighborhood Zoning Map



M E T H O D O L O G Y

Methodology

The Committee produced its recommendations through an extended process of issue identification, data collection and analysis, and further review and discussion. The CDD staff supported this process by gathering and presenting data from a number of sources, chief among them the U.S. Census, a random telephone survey of Strawberry Hill residents, and the Cambridge Assessing Department.

1. *The U.S. Census: 1980-1990*

The Census is a survey of every household taken every ten years by the U.S. Commerce Department Census Bureau as mandated by federal law. It collects demographic information on age distribution within the population, household composition, racial makeup, income, length of residency, ancestry, and other categories. In theory, The Census is a survey of every household and provides us with the most complete profile of the City and its residents. Census data is available from the Community Development Department.

2. *1992 Random Telephone Survey of Strawberry Hill Residents*

In the Fall of 1992, the Atlantic Marketing Research Co., Inc conducted a random telephone survey of 284 households in Strawberry Hill for the CDD to determine the demographic character of the neighborhood as well as residents' perceptions and attitudes on issues of community concern. The Strawberry Hill survey is one of a series of telephone surveys conducted by the

CDD in several neighborhoods in conjunction with the neighborhood study process.

The survey instrument is composed of 66 questions designed by the CDD with the assistance of the consultant. It is a combination of open-ended questions (those to which the respondent can give any response desired) and closed questions with a specified range of answers. The instrument asked four broad categories of questions: general demographics, housing, employment, and attitudinal.

The survey was done, in part, to elicit demographic information similar to what is provided through the Census, but was not yet available, was in need of updating, or was not part of the federal questionnaire. Typically, it takes the Census Bureau two to three years to process neighborhood level data and make it available to municipalities. The intention of the telephone survey was to provide the Committee members with as current a profile of the neighborhood as possible to inform their discussions. In addition, because of the structure of the survey data, the CDD staff were able to use cross tabulations to pull out much more refined information than provided by the Census data. This means the Committee could compile a profile of a particular group in the neighborhood. For example, the Committee could analyze the neighborhood's population in terms of race, income, housing, and more.

The Census and the telephone survey are not directly comparable, as the Census is a house-by-house survey and the telephone survey is a sample of households. While one cannot compare

numbers directly, general trends can be determined and general conclusions can be made.

Another very important reason for conducting the telephone survey was to gather attitudinal information from residents. The survey asked residents about views on development and its positive or negative effects; the need for more housing, especially affordable housing and whether that should be rentals or owner-occupied housing; whether, how often and for what reasons residents use neighboring commercial squares or districts; attitudes about the condition and availability of parks and open space; and other questions on other areas of concern to the neighborhood. As with the demographic data, the Committee could also use cross tabulations of the attitudinal data to get a more refined picture of neighborhood views, such as the attitudes of the neighborhood's elderly residents toward the condition and availability of open space.

Census information and the telephone survey results are available from the CDD.

3. Cambridge Assessor's Data

The Committee used data from the Assessor's office to analyze the nature and quality of the neighborhood's housing stock, to understand the market for renting or buying a house in Strawberry Hill, and to examine the remaining build-out potential in the neighborhood. Housing data

included the number of buildings in each property class (one, two, three-family, etc.), the number of dwelling units, and the number of housing sales in each property class and their sales prices. This data forms the basis for analyzing housing availability and affordability in the neighborhood. Property data, such as building and lot size, was gathered for all commercially zoned areas and higher density residential zoning districts. This information was used in calculating the amount of additional building allowed in the neighborhood under current zoning. All data is current through mid-1997.

4. The Cambridge Zoning Ordinance

The Zoning Ordinance, in conjunction with the Assessor's data forms the basis for determining the remaining build-out potential in the Strawberry Hill neighborhood. The Zoning Ordinance is the part of the municipal code which governs how land and buildings in the City may be used. For each zoning district, the ordinance lays out three types of general regulations: 1) use: what activities or mix of activities may or may not take place; 2) dimensional requirements: what floor-area-ratio, density, height or set back restrictions apply to any one building in any given zoning district; and 3) parking requirements: how many spaces, if any, must be included with a building.

N E I G H B O R H O O D
O V E R V I E W

Neighborhood Overview

History¹

The Strawberry Hill neighborhood (see map) is bounded by Huron Avenue and Fresh Pond, the Boston and Maine railroad tracks, Mt. Auburn Street, and the Town of Belmont.

The area which encompasses the present day Strawberry Hill neighborhood was originally one of three Massachusetts Bay Colony towns along the north bank of the Charles River founded in 1630. Known as Watertown, the area lay between Vassal Lane and Mt. Auburn Street west to Grove Street. The area was essentially a farming village where each townsman was granted an individual parcel near the meeting house which was located on the present day Mt. Auburn Street. This distribution of land resulted in a decentralized pattern of single family farms. Vestiges of this medieval agricultural system can be seen in Cambridge's modern street system. Outlines of the colonial field pattern of long narrow strip lots is illustrated in present day Strawberry Hill along Mt. Auburn and Belmont Streets where Holworthy and Cushing streets reach back to Fresh Pond in a parallel sequence.

Strawberry Hill's natural hilly landscape and improved passenger transportation proved an asset for suburban development of the area. The "Strawberry Hill" residential subdivision was laid out in 1847 along the present-day Holworthy Street with a small oval park included to take advantage of the view of Fresh Pond and a second subdivision named "Auburn" was laid out in 1848

near Fresh Pond and included a circular drive overlooking the Pond. The subdivisions never quite caught on with 19th century middle-class Boston families partly due to the economic Panic of 1848 and the distance from established churches and schools. The area was opened to working-class craftsmen and laborers which led to the development of modest single and two-family houses.

The Fresh Pond ice industry played a large role in the present land use patterns in northwest Cambridge. The proliferation of ice houses around Fresh Pond led to conflicts among owners. A survey of Fresh Pond was commissioned and the whole surface of the Pond was sectioned off into quadrants along each owner's shoreline. Another result of the survey was the construction of an "ice railroad" which extended the existing Charleston Branch Railroad to Fresh Pond establishing the present route of the Boston and Maine Railroad through Northwest Cambridge. The Fresh Pond ice industry eventually consolidated into two companies, one along Concord Avenue and the other on the edge of Cambridge and Belmont. Ice houses in the Strawberry Hill area were located on the present day Glacken Field. The annexing of the Belmont shore in 1880 and the City's landscaping for Kingsley Park in 1892 ended the ice industry on Fresh Pond.

Fresh Pond also served as the source of the City's water supply. During the mid-1800's, the City purchased the privately owned Water Works

¹ Reference *Survey of Architectural History in Cambridge* (Northwest Cambridge) Cambridge Historical Commission, 1977

company to create a single municipal system. The company was pumping water from Fresh Pond down to the area around Cambridge Common. The water supply was subject to contamination from the nearby ice houses which led the City to annex the property and eventually clear the Fresh Pond shore of all ice houses. The existing residences were moved to Strawberry Hill or Concord Avenue.

In the 20th century, the Strawberry Hill neighborhood maintains a strongly suburban character. The neighborhood has a natural landscape which is distinct from the flatness that typifies the rest of Cambridge. The area remains mostly residential with commercial development located along the edges of the neighborhood.

Strawberry Hill Today: A Demographic Profile

Population

Strawberry Hill has one of the smallest resident populations in the City composing 2.7% of the City's 1990 total population. The 1990 Census counted 2,609 residents, a slight increase from the 1980 count. Only neighboring Cambridge Highlands has less population.

Household Characteristics

The proportion of Strawberry Hill's population residing in family households declined from (81.4% to 76.0%) from 1980 to 1990. Family households consist of related persons living together. The number of non-family households in Strawberry Hill increased from 18.6% to 24.0% during the same time period. Non-family households are singles living alone or unrelated adults living together. The number of persons per household in Strawberry Hill decreased from 2.47 in 1980 to 2.30 in 1990. This shift is consistent with the citywide housing occupation trend of smaller households replacing larger households.

Race

The majority of Strawberry Hill's resident population are whites, which is comparable to citywide conditions. The neighborhood's black population doubled (6.9% to 13.8%) from 1980 to

1990. The number of Asians residing in Strawberry Hill nearly tripled during 1980 to 1990 from 1.6% to 4.5%. The neighborhood experienced a slight increase in the Hispanic population (1.9% to 2.1%), which is less than one-third the 1990 citywide proportion of 6.4%.

Place of Birth/Language Characteristics

The number of foreign born Strawberry Hill residents increased by 3.6% to 19.8% from 1980 to 1990. The proportion of Strawberry Hill residents speaking a language other than English at home increased from 18.2% in 1980 to 26.1% in 1990.

Age

Strawberry Hill's resident age distribution pattern differs from citywide trends. In comparison to the 1990 citywide population, Strawberry Hill is home to proportionally more infants and teens in the 0-14 age range which suggests that proportionally more families with children live in Strawberry Hill than citywide. The neighborhood experienced a 58.9% decrease in 15 to 19 year olds. Only Cambridge Highlands had a similar drop. The 1990 Census also shows that 39.4% of the neighborhood population is 45 and over, a slight increase from 1980. This is in contrast to one quarter of the population citywide.

Length of Residency and Tenure

The proportion of Strawberry Hill residents who have lived at the same address for at least five years increased from 52.5% in 1980 to 59.1% in 1990. Citywide, there was a 2.6% increase over the same time period from 40.3% to 42.9%. In 1990, 83% of Strawberry Hill homeowners had occupied their residence for five years or more compared to 43.5% of renters. Among long term residents, 52.2% of households that own their home and 10.8% of households that rent had resided at the same location for more than 20 years at the time of the 1990 US Census.

Educational Attainment

Strawberry Hill's population aged 25 years and older had become better educated between 1980 and 1990. Thirty-one percent of neighborhood residents earned a college degree in 1990 up from 27% in 1980. By comparison, 54.2% of residents citywide have earned a college degree. Thirty-one percent of Strawberry Hill residents are without high school diplomas which is double the citywide figure.

Industry and Occupation

In 1990, 58.7% of Strawberry Hill residents in the workforce were employed in white collar occupations that include professional, executive and administrative positions. The largest decrease in Strawberry Hill occupations occurred in the category of Fabricators, Operators and Laborers, generally considered "unskilled labor" which declined from 19.0% of the workforce in 1980 to 6.9% in 1990.

Income

The median income for Strawberry Hill families increased by 21.6% to \$35,357 during the decade ending in 1990. In 1989, the citywide median family income (\$39,900) exceeded Strawberry Hill's by 13.1%. During the same period, the median income for all Strawberry Hill households increased by 10% to \$28,368. All comparisons are based on adjusted 1989 dollars.

A N A L Y S I S A N D R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S

Land Use, Urban Design, and Zoning

Background

Regulation of the City's growth and land use patterns is achieved through a variety of techniques. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, farmland in North and West Cambridge was partitioned for residential subdivisions. Many of the house lots within the divisions contained deed restrictions which served a similar purpose as the City's current zoning regulations. Many deeds required building setbacks which provided open space and prohibited "nauseous and offensive businesses" which would have a negative impact on the quality of life in the neighborhood.

Today, the City uses the zoning code, the building code, historic conservation districts and regulations governing flood plains, wetlands and other environmentally sensitive areas to regulate land use. Maintaining a livable environment requires additional measures such as materials and building design, landscaping, scale, and the integration of open space and pedestrian connection with the built environment. Currently, small pockets of the City, Harvard Square, for example,



are regulated by specific design and development standards.

For zoning purposes, the City is divided into 39 zoning categories which control land development through distance of setbacks, height, density, use, open space, parking quantity and signage. The following zones are in use in Strawberry Hill: Residence B, Residence A-2, Residence C-1, Residence C-3, and Business A-1 (commercial and residential). Strawberry Hill's zoning reflects the residential character of the neighborhood. The neighborhood is mainly zoned Residence B which is a two-family and townhouse district. In 1995, the City amended the zoning regulations for Residence B districts citywide. Strawberry Hill residents participated in the rezoning effort which allows a floor area ratio of 0.35 for any portion of a lot greater than 5,000 square feet.

The Residence C-1 district allows one, two and three-family houses as well as townhouses. The Corcoran Park housing development in back of Cushing Street is located in Strawberry Hill's C-1 district. The neighborhood has a Residence C-3 district located along Huron Avenue which allows dense buildings with a maximum 120 foot height limitation. The approximately 200 feet, 248-unit Huron Towers apartment building was constructed when there was no height limit in the C-3 district. Strawberry Hill's commercial district has a Business A-1 designation and is located on a two-block section along Belmont Street near the Star Market Shopping area. The district allows small-scaled residential and commercial buildings limited to 35 feet in height with housing permitted.

Survey Results

Residents polled by Atlantic Marketing were split on their opinion of the impact of commercial development in Cambridge. Almost half (46%) of residents saw commercial development over the previous five years as a positive community influence. Homeowners were more positive (59%) about development than renters (39%) citing additional jobs as a major positive. Thirty-nine percent of residents felt that a major negative effect of commercial development was crowding and overdevelopment.

Over half of the residents polled did not feel adequately informed about development plans in Strawberry Hill. Fifty-two percent of renters felt well-informed compared to 37% of homeowners. The poll also revealed 62 % of non-whites felt better informed than whites at 42%. A majority (86%) of polled residents preferred to learn about development plans through newspapers followed closely by neighborhood newsletters and flyers or mail.



Discussion

Strawberry Hill's suburban character underscores the Committee's discussion about the potential for increased backyard development in the neighborhood and the need to maintain existing open space. The Committee discussed the change in Residence B zoning and how it addresses the issue of open space preservation in Strawberry Hill. The Committee recommended expanding the new Residence B land use restrictions to as much of the neighborhood as possible. There was agreement that backyard development should be managed through enforcing the existing zoning laws and maintaining the neighborhood's zoned areas. The Committee also discussed measures the City could take to increase awareness of development activity in the neighborhood.

The Committee discussed ways to improve the neighborhood's streetscape through urban design. Improving the visual attractiveness of key entry points into the neighborhood was highlighted. The Committee also discussed the possibility of establishing an alternative use for the existing railroad corridor which would add open space to the neighborhood. The Committee supported better design of access points to the Fresh Pond Reservoir and assessing existing conditions of street trees and sidewalks.

Land Use, Urban Design, and Zoning Recommendations

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1. Downzone the C-1 area outside of Corcoran Park to Residence B district.
 2. Maintain Residence B zoned areas.
 3. Manage backyard development through stronger enforcement of existing zoning laws.
 4. Maintain current restriction for commercial development zoning to Belmont Street.
 5. Establish community-wide notification of applications for zoning variances, permits, etc., through consistently-designed, conspicuous signage posted prominently on the relevant premises. (Note: the City Council voted for City-wide notification in September of 1997. Notification already exists for special permits and variances.)
 6. Clean up Boston and Maine Railroad, Watertown Branch, tracks behind Huron Avenue and Mt. Auburn Street.
 7. Establish an alternative use of the Boston and Maine Railroad, Watertown Branch, corridor which runs through West Cambridge as a linear park.
 8. Improve access to Fresh Pond Reservoir:
 - a) improve access for pedestrians, baby carriages/strollers, wheelchairs and tricycles from the golf course club house to the Reservation path,
 - b) improve access for pedestrians, baby carriages/strollers, wheelchairs and tricycles at Park Avenue, and
 - c) ensure that all improvements meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.
 9. Continue multiple use of the path bordering Fresh Pond Reservation, allowing bicycle use at walking speeds.
 10. Improve visual attractiveness of key entry points to the neighborhood:
 - a) Cushing Street at Belmont Street
 - b) Holworthy Street at Belmont Street
 - c) Mt. Auburn bridge over the Boston and Maine Railway, i.e., remove trash in fence.
 11. Assess lighting needs and improve lighting where necessary throughout the neighborhood.
 12. Increase maintenance of street trees and plantings:
 - a) post standardized notice of pending tree removal on the relevant tree two weeks prior to removal (Note: currently, notice is placed on trees prior to removal)
 - b) Remove dead trees and replace with new ones.
 13. Improve existing sidewalks and build new ones on side streets
 - a) Lawn Street
 - b) St. Saviour Ct.
 - c) Vineyard Street
 - d) May Street
-

GROWTH POLICY CONTEXT

The City's Growth Policy Document, *Toward a Sustainable Future*, outlines a number of policies which are relevant to the issues and concerns addressed during the zoning, urban design and land use discussion. Policies 1 and 2 recommend

that the historically identifiable characteristics of a neighborhood and the existing land use structure in residential and commercial neighborhoods throughout the City should be maintained. The full text of policies referenced are in Appendix I.

Transportation

BACKGROUND

Cambridge's densely populated residential neighborhoods are increasingly sharing space with vehicles traveling in and out of the City. Cambridge's challenge is to provide safe and efficient means of transporting people and vehicles through City streets. One of the City's goals is to reduce automobile trips and encourage alternative modes of transportation within Cambridge including walking, biking and public transportation.

The City continues to work on providing a way for vehicles to get in and out of Cambridge while retaining the residential character of its neighborhoods. In the Strawberry Hill neighborhood, the City considers Belmont Street, Huron Avenue, and Mt. Auburn Street high traffic areas where balancing a variety of transportation needs is particularly challenging. One of the City's goals is to keep high concentrations of traffic off residential streets and onto major arterial streets. The City uses several strategies to limit the growth in automobile trips in the City including working with private employers to implement vehicle trip reduction programs, building infra-

structure for all modes of transportation and working with the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) to improve public transportation. Also, the City's Bicycle Committee and Pedestrian Advisory Committee were established to promote alternative modes of transportation within the City.

Survey Results

Sixty percent of telephone survey respondents said that the lack of parking in the Strawberry Hill neighborhood was a major concern. Over half of the respondents (54%) viewed traffic congestion as a major cause for concern and 53% listed the limited availability of public transportation as a major concern.

Discussion

The Committee discussed vehicular travel patterns entering and leaving Strawberry Hill and how they affect the traffic flow within the neighborhood. The Committee identified areas in the neighborhood with a high concentration of traffic and examined their impact. The Committee also explored ways to alleviate the impact of what it considered heavy traffic areas.

The Committee felt that early morning and evening traffic patterns along Cushing and Holworthy Streets was an issue of public safety. Cars exiting Cushing and Holworthy Streets converge with bus traffic and pedestrians trying to cross Belmont Street. The Committee examined whether the design of Belmont Street encouraged vehicular speed and what, if any, measures should



be taken to slow down traffic. The Committee suggested that the City examine whether installing curb extensions at the corner of Cushing and Belmont Streets would address the speed issue. The Committee also discussed the placement and timing of existing traffic lights and the pedestrian activated signal light on Belmont Street.

The Committee discussed existing parking patterns in the neighborhood and what can be

done to discourage illegal parking. The Committee felt that enforcement of existing parking regulations would be one way to address the congestion problem where Cushing Street comes out to Belmont Street. The Committee noted that the area around the Haggerty School needs to be studied before measures for reducing speed are considered.

Transportation Recommendations

A. Parking

1. Parking enforcement

Enforce all parking regulations paying particular attention to vehicles parking at the following intersections:

- Cushing Street and Belmont Street
- Holworthy Street and Belmont Street
- Locust Street and Cushing Street
- Locust Street and Holworthy Street
- Locust Terrace and Locust Street

B. Traffic congestion

1. Reduce congestion on Cushing Street at the Haggerty School through police enforcement
2. Enforce idling laws for trucks in residential areas along Locust, Cushing, Belmont, and Holworthy Streets

C. Pedestrian safety

1. Address pedestrian street crossing facilities at the following locations:
 - a) Consider adding a signalized crosswalk on Huron Avenue at Park Avenue
 - b) join the pedestrian stop light and the bus stop on Belmont Street near Cushing Street
2. Suggest that the Town of Belmont consider the following recommendations:
 - a) install a traffic light at Huron Avenue and Grove Street
 - b) prohibit left turns from Grove Street to Huron Avenue from 7:00 AM - 9:00 AM

- c) study the timing of the lights at Grove Street and Belmont Street to improve pedestrians' ability to cross Belmont Street safely
3. Study timing of the traffic light at Mt. Auburn Street and Belmont Street to improve pedestrians' ability to cross Belmont Street safely
4. Install a blinking light near the Haggerty School to designate school in session
5. Evaluate whether traffic calming measures would be appropriate at the following locations:
 - a) curb extension at the corner of Cushing and Belmont Streets
 - b) Cushing Street, Holworthy Street, and Huron Avenue

D. Motorist safety

1. Increase enforcement of posted speed limits in the following locations:
 - a) Cushing Street from Lawn Street to Belmont Street
 - b) Huron Avenue from Aberdeen to Grove Street
2. Post speed limit signs on Holworthy Street
3. Increase enforcement of speed limit from Belmont Street to Huron Avenue
4. Increase enforcement of one-way traffic restrictions throughout neighborhood
5. Improve visibility of entry point at Cushing Street from Huron Avenue with reflective materials and/or low-level lighting

GROWTH POLICY CONTEXT

Policy 18 emphasizes improving MBTA service within the City. Policies 21 and 22 addresses vehicular travel patterns through City neighborhoods. Policy 21 emphasizes the need to discourage vehicle travel through residential areas by improving the roadways at the edges of the City's neighborhoods. Policy 22 calls for implementing measures to improve the City's roadway system.

Housing

BACKGROUND

Strawberry Hill's suburban character is reflected in the scale of its residential buildings and housing density. Fifty percent of Strawberry Hill's 1,116 housing units are single, two and three- family dwellings. Forty percent of the neighborhood's housing units are multi-family dwellings primarily composed of Strawberry Hill's affordable housing. Corcoran Park is a 152-unit housing development which sits on 8.4 acres of land owned by the Cambridge Housing Authority. The development is suburban in scale and blends in with the surrounding neighborhood. Huron Towers is a 248 unit 20-story high rise building constructed in the 1970's which stands in sharp contrast to the smaller-scale housing situated throughout the neighborhood. Strawberry Hill's remaining units are condominium or mixed use² buildings. Strawberry Hill's housing density is 5 units per acre making it one of the least dense



neighborhoods in the City (only Cambridge Highlands is lower).

The rate of homeownership in Strawberry Hill increased from 30% in 1980 to 34% in 1990 exceeding the Citywide rate (30%) in 1990. Also, 66% of Strawberry Hill's housing units were occupied by renters; less than the Citywide rate of 70%. From 1985 to 1990 Strawberry Hill experienced less housing turnover than any other Cambridge neighborhood. In 1990, 52% of long-term Strawberry Hill homeowners and 11% of renters had resided at the same location for more than 20 years.

Preserving the existing housing stock and creating new homeownership and rental housing opportunities is one of the City's top priorities. The City has developed several programs which provide opportunities to preserve and expand the housing supply.³ Huron Towers (700 Huron Avenue) is a property which would have benefited from a City petition requesting permission from the state to mitigate rent increases in "expiring use" properties. Huron Towers is an "expiring use" property built in the 1970's with federal funds which provided private housing developers with low-interest, 40-year mortgages. In exchange, the owners were to keep a percentage of the rents in their buildings affordable for low- and moderate-income residents. A provision in the loans allowed owners to prepay their mortgages after 20 years and raise rents to market levels. The owners of Huron Towers chose to prepay their loan and

² Mixed use included buildings with both residential and commercial uses.

³ See Appendix I

the property is now market rate. Existing low-income tenants have received enhanced Section 8 vouchers that pay the owner close to market rent. These vouchers are renewed on an annual basis. The owner, however, is under no obligation to keep rents affordable.



SURVEY RESULTS

Respondents to the Atlantic telephone survey were almost evenly divided on the kind of housing opportunities needed in Strawberry Hill 29% said rental housing; 22% said homeownership; 21% said both; and 28% said neither. Sixty-six percent of respondents supported the idea of additional housing in their neighborhood for lower income households. Respondents counted rental costs, displacement

due to high housing costs, and condition of housing as their major housing concerns. While 53% of respondents said that they expect to own a home some day, only 11% expected they could afford a house in Strawberry Hill. The higher the income level of the respondents, the more likely they were to expect to own a home someday: 91% of high income respondents vs. 32% of low income respondents. The survey revealed that 68% of respondents were unaware of City programs which help finance homeownership.⁴

DISCUSSIONS

The Committee reviewed Citywide housing policies and discussed how they might affect the Strawberry Hill neighborhood. The Committee discussed what actions can be taken to prevent the loss of affordable units such as Huron Towers and strategies that can be used to preserve existing housing. The Committee agreed that the Strawberry Hill community should be involved in deciding what type of development would be appropriate for the neighborhood. The Committee also agreed that Strawberry Hill should have a system in place which will allow residents to share information about housing development and affordable housing opportunities in the neighborhood.

⁴ Reference, *Guide to Cambridge Housing Programs*. City of Cambridge, CDD

Housing Recommendations

-
1. Maintain low density, residential quality of the neighborhood
 2. Assess existing housing stock and vacant lots to determine potential for affordable housing development and rehabilitation
 3. Post a notice of proposed construction projects prominently in the neighborhood

GROWTH POLICY CONTEXT

Policy 26 stresses neighborhood preservation by retaining the existing character of residential neighborhoods and suggests changes in neighborhood character should be evaluated through a planning process. Policy 29 encourages rehabilitation of existing housing stock to provide units for low- and moderate-income residents.

Economic Development and Employment

BACKGROUND⁵

To maintain a healthy economic environment the City works with local businesses to provide a variety of employment opportunities for area residents. The City strives to create a business climate which helps to retain existing businesses and attract new companies. The businesses, in turn, generate goods and services which contribute to the quality of life for Cambridge residents. Local businesses supply a tax base to the City which pays two-thirds of the property taxes. Cambridge's healthy commercial property tax base enables the City to provide a richer array of municipal service than most communities can afford, while charging residential property owners a lower than average property tax rate.

Cambridge's economy provides a rich array of job opportunities. With 105,000 jobs, the City functions as regional employment center, employing nearly half its working age population and residents of over 80 other communities as well. The Cambridge economy has consistently outperformed the regional and state economies for more than fifteen years, maintaining lower

unemployment and commercial vacancy rates throughout the period. Currently, the unemployment rate is around 1.8% and the office vacancy rate is under 2%. Space for growing companies is in very short supply, but one million square feet of new space is under construction and plans for substantial additional construction are underway. Employment is concentrated in services. The institutional sector (universities, hospitals and government) comprise 25% of total employment. Business sector employment is concentrated in four service industry sectors, each comprising approximately 15% of total employment: engineering and management services (including engineering and architectural services, research and testing services, and management and public relations), business services (computer and data processing, among others), business repair services (including janitors and security guards), and wholesale and retail trade. Manufacturing and construction combined represent approximately 8% of employment.

Cambridge residents who have attained high education levels are better able to access job opportunities offered by local businesses particularly technology-based companies. Strawberry Hill's population has been experiencing an increase in education and a change in job occupations which indicate better opportunities for neighborhood residents.

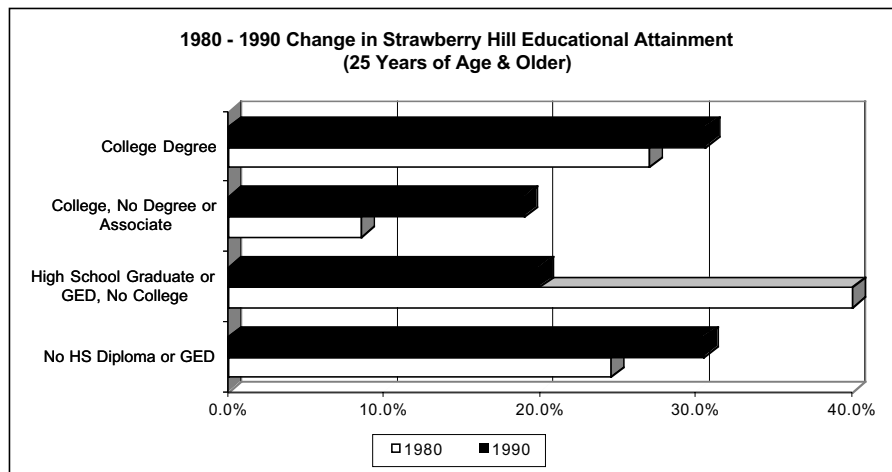


⁵ Reference, *Cambridge Economic Development Policy*, City of Cambridge, Community Development Department, November 24, 1997

SURVEY AND CENSUS RESULTS

Educational Attainment

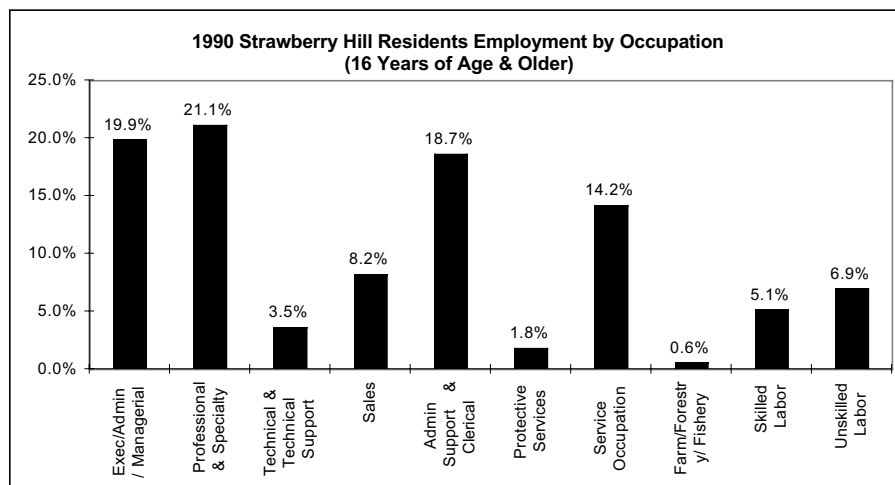
Census data show that from 1980 to 1990, the Strawberry Hill population experienced a 39.7% increase in the proportion of neighborhood residents 25 years of age or older with at least a college degree. The 1990 Census also revealed that the 30.6% of Strawberry Hill residents with a college degree approximately equaled the 30.5% of neighborhood residents without a high school diploma.



Source: 1980 and 1990 U. S. Census

Industry and Occupation

Strawberry Hill residents were primarily employed in white collar occupations in 1990. From 1980 to 1990, Strawberry Hill residents experienced the greatest occupational increases in Executive, Administrative, and Managerial positions and Administrative Support and Clerical positions. This favorably compares to



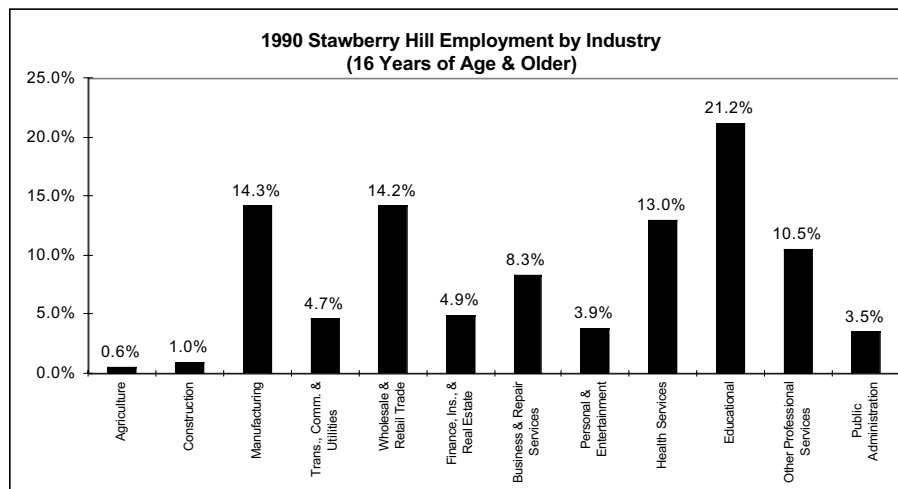
Source: 1980 and 1990 U. S. Census

Citywide increases in white collar occupations during the same time period. Strawberry Hill experienced the largest decreases in blue collar occupations such as heavy equipment operators and laborers.

In 1990, the majority of Strawberry Hill residents (79.4%) were employed in the service sector compared to 20.6% employed in non-service industries. Twenty-one percent of Strawberry Hill residents were employed by educational institutions in 1990 compared to 26%



Citywide. Between 1980 and 1990, Strawberry Hill experienced a 40% increase in resident employment by other professions such as engineering, research, and architecture. Other professions employed 10.5% of Strawberry Hill residents and 15.5% of all City residents.



Source: 1980 and 1990 U. S. Census

Income

During the decade ending in 1990, the median income of Strawberry Hill families grew at a faster rate than the median income for all households living in the neighborhood. Median family income rose from \$29,053 in 1980 to \$35,357 in 1990 compared to \$25,790 to \$28,368 for Strawberry Hill households. The rise in family income corresponds with an increase in the number of college educated adults residing in Strawberry Hill and the neighborhood employment change from blue collar to white collar industries.

Employment and Skill Matches

Seventy-two percent of survey respondents felt that their current job matches their skills very well. There was a high correlation between job satisfaction and education: 90% of respondents with post-graduate degrees felt their skills and job match very well, 73% of all college graduates, and 33% of those with some high school education. Nearly one-quarter of respondents felt that there is not a good match between their job skills and the employment opportunities available in Cambridge. Respondents with lower education levels were more likely to feel a poor match and Blacks were far more likely to mention an inadequate match than Whites and Hispanics.

DISCUSSION

Committee discussion focused on existing businesses located in the neighborhood's commercial district. The Committee agreed that commercial development should stay in the zoned business area located at the edge of the neighborhood. Committee members suggested that the City and businesses work with Strawberry Hill residents to insure that parking regulations are followed by business customers to minimize disruption to the neighborhood. Committee members would like to see the City provide incentives for local businesses to maintain and improve their property.



Economic Development and Employment Recommendations

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1. Maintain current commercial zoning destinations
 2. Increase coordination among neighborhood, City and commercial establishments to improve compliance with parking regulations.
 3. Provide incentives to the retail businesses on Belmont Street to improve their appearances.
 4. Provide incentives for retail businesses to keep their frontages (sidewalks) and parking lot clean.

GROWTH POLICY CONTEXT

Policy 47 suggests that the City's retail districts should be strengthened and new businesses should be incorporated into the existing squares and corridors. Policy 48 encourages the City to recognize the unique qualities of local retail districts and work to insure their economic vitality.

The Cambridge Economic Development Policy context policy 5.3 emphasizes the importance of neighborhood commercial districts in providing goods and services to residents and maintaining the durability of residential neighborhoods.

Open Space

BACKGROUND

Cambridge is a high density City with less than 10% of its land mass available as public recreational open space. City residents also have access to Metropolitan District Commission recreational resources located within City limits i.e., Alewife Reservation, the Charles River, Magazine Beach, the Gore Street skating rink, and the McCrehan Pool. In 1988, the City Manager formed an Open Space Committee composed of City departments which work together to maximize resident access to the City's 377 acres of open space. The Committee coordinates the operation and management of the open space system and works on open space planning.

The City's principal means of improving its stock of recreational facilities is through rehabilitation. The City's existing facilities, particularly in the eastern section, serve multiple recreational functions and are in constant need of upgrade and repair. The Open Space Committee has developed an inventory of each facility in the City

evaluating design, construction, programming and maintenance. The scarcity of available land and high acquisition costs contribute to the difficulty in expanding the City's supply of open space. Over the past decade, the City has added the 50 acre Danehy Park to its open space inventory and the East Cambridge Riverfront area i.e., Lechmere Canal Park, Centanni Park and Front Park.

The Strawberry Hill neighborhood has direct access to Fresh Pond Reservation facilities including a nine-hole golf course, tennis courts, and Glacken Field. The neighborhood also has the 0.5 acre Haggerty School playground.

SURVEY RESULTS

Survey respondents expressed great concern about the conditions and availability of neighborhood open space. The condition of neighborhood parks was the highest concern followed by availability of open space, and availability of recreation facilities.



Views of Park Availability and Condition

Issues of Concern

Issue	Major	Minor	No Concern
Conditions of parks/open space	63%	22%	15% *
Availability of open space	60%	29%	18%
Availability of recreation facilities	58%	29%	13%

Source: Atlantic Marketing Research Co., Inc. 1993

Survey respondents living in public housing expressed more concern about the condition of neighborhood parks (70%) and availability of recreation facilities (68%) than home owners, 59% and 45% respectively.

DISCUSSIONS

The Study Committee discussed Strawberry Hill open space issues during two sessions. The first session focused on construction of the city's new water treatment plant on the existing site. The City's water department staff made a presentation on the Fresh Pond Maintenance and Improvements Plan. Committee members were concerned about access to the Fresh Pond Reservation during the 2 1/2 year construction period. The Committee was also interested in mitigation measures for traffic, noise, and dust problems which may be associated with the project. The Committee agreed that additional call boxes and increased lighting should be installed at the

Reservation. The Committee discussed the types of materials used for existing pathways and whether a natural path would be created.

The second session focused on an upgrade of facilities at Glacken Field and recreational program available to neighborhood youth. Committee members were concerned about the condition of the tennis courts and whether the courts would be replaced with a proposed West Cambridge Youth Center. City staff explained that the tennis courts currently serve multiple recreational functions due to lack of available open space. There was a discussion about the golf course and whether programs are available to neighborhood youth.

The Committee discussed the possibility of the City expanding its existing open space inventory by purchasing private land. Specifically, the Committee discussed reusing the Boston and Maine Railroad line, Watertown Branch as a linear park.

Open Space Recommendations

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1. Preserve green space in residential areas
 2. Create green open space by establishing a linear park on existing Boston and Maine Railroad, Watertown Branch, right-of-way
 3. Connect open spaces from Fresh Pond to the Charles River
 4. Improve current recreational facilities located in the neighborhood:
 - a) recondition Glacken Field
 - b) maintain existing bleachers at Glacken Field
 - c) maintain tot lot equipment and surfaces at Glacken Field
 - d) repair, upgrade, and maintain tennis courts
 5. Maintain wooded area of Fresh Pond

GROWTH POLICY CONTEXT

The City's open space policies 63, 68, and 69 complement the Committee's recommendation for expansion of existing open space. The policies also encourage retention of existing open spaces regardless of size or intended use. Open space policy 70 emphasizes the City's commitment to maintain and upgrade existing facilities. Policy #63 encourages the City to provide a variety of recreational opportunities for residents by either expanding the existing open space inventory or applying multiple uses to City facilities.

General Recommendations

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1. Create an independent neighborhood association
 2. Develop a community bulletin board

C O N C L U S I O N

Conclusion

Strawberry Hill borders the neighboring towns of Belmont and Watertown which share its early history. The neighborhood's initial pattern of residential development included deep back lots which residents would like to see preserved as open space areas. Committee members and neighborhood residents who participated in the public forums voiced support for maintaining Strawberry Hill's suburban character by using existing zoning laws and improving land uses throughout the neighborhood. Positioned between two major thoroughfares, the Strawberry Hill neighborhood has experienced increased traffic similar to other city neighborhoods.

Committee recommendations addressed transportation and parking issues which echo concerns citywide. Committee discussions and recommendations across each topic area included the need to increase information to residents about neighborhood development issues. The Committee recommends that the neighborhood establish a community organization which could assist in disseminating information. The Committee's recommendations and the public forum discussions are an important addition to the City's long-term planning goals and will serve as a decision-making guide for future improvements in the Strawberry Hill neighborhood.

A P P E N D I X I

City of Cambridge Housing Activities

The Housing Division of the Community Development Department is responsible for developing policies and programs to increase and preserve affordable housing opportunities for low and moderate income residents of Cambridge. The Housing Division, in conjunction with the Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust, spearheads the CityHOME Initiative and uses federal (CDBG and HOME) and state resources to accomplish its goals.

The CITYHOME Initiative represents the City's primary response to the major changes occurring in the Cambridge housing market, including both the termination of rent control and policy changes in federal housing programs. The goal of the Initiative is to preserve and increase affordable rental and homeownership opportunities for low and moderate income residents of the City.

The City funds, combined with other federal and state funds, have led to the creation or preservation in housing development projects of over 1,200 affordable units in the 2 _ years since the commencement of the CITYHOME Initiative. This includes projects that have been completed between July, 1995 and December, 1997 or that are currently under development.

The main programs undertaken in this Initiative include:

Non-Profit Acquisition and Development of MultiFamily Properties: With financial support

from the Trust, the City's non-profit and public housing organizations have acquired existing formerly rent controlled properties for long term affordable housing use, as well as taken advantage of rare opportunities for new development;

Affordable Housing Rehab Loan Program:

Working with the City's non-profit partner, Cambridge Neighborhood Apartment Housing Services, Inc. (CNAHS), this program provides rehab financing to private owners of multifamily properties in return for a set-aside of units at affordable rents for low and moderate income tenants;

Condo Buyer Initiative: This homeownership program provides financial and technical assistance to first time homebuyers purchasing units in Cambridge;

Preservation of Expiring Use Restriction

Properties: The City has devoted significant resources to preserving the existing stock of federally-assisted rental housing facing expiring use restrictions. These resources include technical and financial assistance to tenants and owners of these properties. These efforts have succeeded in preserving the long-term affordability of three of these expiring use properties with a total of 590 affordable units.

A P P E N D I X I I

Growth Policy

LAND USE, URBAN DESIGN AND ZONING POLICIES

Policy #1

Existing residential neighborhoods, or any portions of a neighborhood having an identifiable and consistent built character, should be maintained at their prevailing pattern of development and building density scale.

Policy #2

Except in evolving industrial areas, the city's existing land use structure and the area of residential and commercial neighborhoods should remain essentially as they have developed historically.

TRANSPORTATION POLICIES

Policy #21

Discourage vehicle travel through residential areas both by providing roadway improvements around the neighborhoods' perimeters and by operational changes to roadways which will impede travel on local streets.

Policy #22

Undertake reasonable measures to improve the functioning of the city's street network, without increasing through-capacity, to reduce congestion and noise and facilitate bus and other non-automobile circulation. However, minor arterials with a residential character should be protected whenever possible.

HOUSING POLICIES

Policy #26

Maintain and preserve existing residential neighborhoods at their current density, scale, and character. Consider exceptions to this policy when residents have strong reservation about existing character, are supportive of change, and have evaluated potential changes in neighborhood character through a planning process.

Policy #29

Encourage rehabilitation of the existing housing stock. Concentrate City funds and staff efforts on rehabilitation that will provide units for low- and moderate-income residents.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

Policy #47

Existing retail districts should be strengthened; new retail activity should be directed toward the City's existing retail squares and corridors.

Policy #48

Retail districts should be recognized for their unique assets, opportunities and functions and those aspects should be encouraged, in part, to ensure that they can compete with regional shopping centers and maintain their economic viability.

OPEN SPACE POLICIES

Policy #63

Open space and recreational facilities serving a wide range of functions and clientele, including the elderly and special needs populations, should be encouraged, either through expansion of the existing inventory, through multiple use of existing facilities or through creative programming of those facilities.

Policy #68

Only under extraordinary circumstances should existing open space facilities be eliminated from the City's inventory for other uses; small, passively or merely visually used facilities, should not be undervalued in this regard merely for lack of intensive or active recreational use.

Policy #69

The City should encourage the permanent retention and protection of useful, effective, attractive private open space whether publicly accessible or not. Community use of private recreational and open space facilities in the City should be encouraged at reasonable levels where the private function of those facilities would not be impaired and where the recreational activity provided by the private facility is not well served in available public facilities.

Policy #70

Repair, maintenance and timely upgrading of existing facilities should be the City's highest fiscal priority with regard to open space and recreational facilities. The City should explore and adopt, as appropriate, mechanisms whereby the private sector can reasonably provide, assist in and/or contribute to the maintenance of publicly useable open space and recreational facilities.
